



Foster Parent Spotlight

Bill & Karen Irwin



Bill and Karen Irwin are a retired couple in their sixties from Delafield and have been married for thirty-seven years! Bill worked for an oil company in Saudi

Arabia for many years while Karen did a lot of different odd jobs and volunteer work. The couple enjoys the outdoors and gardening in their spare time. Bill and Karen have three birth children of their own ranging in ages from thirty-five to thirty years old. The two have been foster parents for about a year and have cared for approximately fifteen foster children in emergency and respite settings.

Bill stated that he became interested in foster parenting after moving back to the United States and reading all the articles in the newspaper about abused and neglected children. Karen agreed with her husband and added that

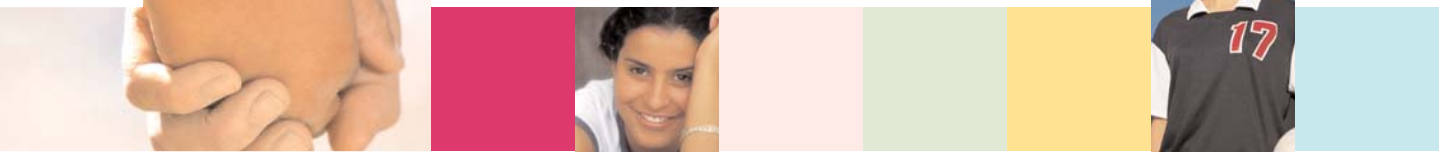
We Need You!

If you would like more information about becoming a foster parent, please contact Shari Rather at: srather@waukeshacounty.gov 262-548-7267 or visit our website at www.waukeshacounty.gov and follow the links to foster care.

they felt they had so much to give and wanted to give back to the community. When asked about the rewarding side to fostering, the couple smiled and said that in the midst of turmoil and chaos, it is a wonderful feeling to provide peace and safety to a child even if it is just for one night.

The Irwin's "words of wisdom" for foster parents is to enjoy it and never be afraid to accept support from friends and neighbors. The couple also remarked that they pride their fostering "style" on the fact that every child that walks through their door has an empty slate and is treated like an individual, despite what his or her file says. The Irwin's are a wonderful couple and have so much to offer - we appreciate their positivism and assistance in Waukesha County!

August '04 Placements	Contact Numbers:	Social Workers:	Thank You to Zurich North America Claims...
Regular Foster Care: 75 Children 7 Admitted 4 Discharged	Waukesha H & HS 262-548-7212	Bob Alioto 262-548- 7262	for the generous donations of items to the Foster Parent Clothing Closet. Instead of a company picnic the firm decided to make a donation to the Foster Parent Closet. They have supplied us with clothing, new socks, underwear, tooth brushes, diapers and numerous other items.
Treatment Foster Care: 29 Children 4 Admitted 1 Discharged	Eve Altizer Children's Mental Health Outreach 262-548-7310	Peggy Beisser 262-548-7261	Thank you, thank you, thank you!
Group Homes: 2 Children 1 Admitted 1 Discharged	Kathe Blum 262-548-7275	Kathe Blum 262-548-7275	
Residential Care Facilities: 13 Children 1 Admitted 4 Discharged	Barb Hufschmidt 262-548-7270	Barb Hufschmidt 262-548-7270	
Relative Placements: 17 Children 2 Admitted 0 Discharged	Crisis Mentoring Pager 414-848-6711	Margaret Johnson 262-548-7265	
	Medical Emergency 911	Suzane Koberstein 262-548-7348	
	Family Emergency 211	Elizabeth Russo 262-548-7349	
	Judy David Support Group President 414-671-3747 (home) 414-462-8446	Kim Sampson 262-548-7273	
	Lisa Alden, Supervisor 262-548-7271	Linda Senger 262-548-7698	
	Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator 262-548-7267	Marilyn Videgar 262-548-7363	
		Ted Wuerslin 262-548-7269	
		Jennifer Wygle 262-548-7260	



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Foster Care Forum

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Waukesha County Foster Care Forum is published monthly by the Department of Health and Human Services. Please send your ideas and suggestions to: srather@waukeshacounty.gov 500 Riverview Ave. in Waukesha 53188

Suggestions for Engaging Birth Parents

Rules of Conversation

The social worker should explain the foster parents' role to the birth parents. Together the social worker and birth and foster parents should decide how to conduct themselves and agree on rules for telephone contact such as:

- Time and days for calls should be agreed upon.
- Birth parents should not make promises to the child.
- All adults should talk positively to the child about the other adults and about the child.
- The child is not to be accused of blame for the birth family's disruption.

Don't take personally anything the birth parents might say. This is the birth parent's way to fight for their children until they learn and accept the more appropriate ways.

Telephone Contact

- Contact birth parents within 48 hours of placement, if possible. The child's social worker must approve of contact first.
- Join with the birth parents by telling them you know they must be worried about their child. Assure them you aren't trying to keep their child and that you want to help them.
- Ask the birth parents for help with their child. Find out from them when the child usually goes to bed, what the child likes to eat, how the parent fixes the child's hair, who the most important people are in the child's life, etc.

Visits

Visits are more successful if held in a "family atmosphere," such as at parks, fast food restaurants, day care play areas (off hours), or family rooms in an agency or foster home.

- Be sensitive to the birth parents' feelings. Don't overdress the children; understand why the birth parents give candy and other things to the children (to show love); understand how hard it is for birth parents sometimes to face their children on visits.
- Show the birth family the child's Life Book and ask them to help with the book. Ask for family pictures and family stories. Give the birth family copies of photos taken while in the foster home.
- Have children draw pictures or make something for their parents.
- Ask for the birth parents' opinions on parenting issues concerning their child: discipline, foods, rules and other things that enable them to practice parenting while having the foster parent as mentors. This is important especially if the plan is reunification. Trust can be built if the parent is respected for the strengths in their lives.

Children and Pertussis

Pertussis (whooping cough) can be very dangerous to infants and young children, but anyone can catch it-even adults.

Pertussis is an infection that starts like a common cold, with a mild cough. The cough then gets much worse, often with spells or "fits" of coughing that can cause vomiting or loss of breath. Sometimes young children make a "whooping" sound as they try to catch their breath. The cough is often worse at night and usually does not get better with cough medicine.

Pertussis can be spread from one person to another when the sick person coughs or sneezes. Usually you need to be around the sick person for an hour or more for the disease to spread.

Children under age 7 can be immunized against pertussis with the DTaP vaccine. Make sure all your children are up-to-date on their shots and that sick children are kept at home. Please call your doctor for more information or call your local health department for help finding immunization clinics.

If you or your child has pertussis, or a cough that might be pertussis, you should:

- See your doctor for testing and treatment
- Take antibiotics (as prescribed by your doctor)
- Stay isolated from people until you are not contagious

**For information on Pertussis and Immunizations Clinics
call the Waukesha County Public Health Division at
262-896-8430**

What Behaviors Indicate *that a Child's Mental Health may be "at risk"?*

- Preschool Children**
- Cannot play with others or objects
 - Absence of language or communication
 - Frequently fights with others
 - Very sad
 - Extreme mood swings
 - Unusually fearful
 - Inappropriate responses to situations (e.g. laughs instead of cries)
 - Withdrawn
 - Extremely active
 - Loss of earlier skills (e.g. toileting, language, motor)
 - Sudden behavior changes
 - Very accident prone
 - Destructive to self and/or others



- Always Consider**
- How severe is the behavior?
 - How many weeks or months has the behavior been occurring?
 - How long does the behavior last (e.g. minutes or hours)?
 - How does the behavior compare with the behavior of other children of the same age?
 - Are there events in the early childhood education setting, or at home, that make the behavior better or worse?

If a child displays any of the behaviors described above and the answers to the questions make you think the behavior could be problematic, then:

- Talk with a colleague or supervisor
- Talk with the child's family
- Recognize cultural differences
- Get more information
- Seek professional help

Remember, it's always better to get more information and help when you notice behaviors that might be a risk to a child's healthy development.

Connecting With Birth Parents

As foster parents we can help the children in our care by working to develop a relationship with their birth parents. We do not have to approve of the things birth parents have done or even of the things they are doing (or not doing) to regain custody of their children. We do need to have some interaction with the parents for the sake of the children.

Foster care placement is not unlike a divorce with contested child custody. As foster parents we could follow some of the same guidelines suggested to divorcing parents. We cause the children further hurt when we put them in the middle.

If we put the children first, the transition will be much smoother for them. If we realize that the birth parents will always be the birth parents, even in situations where their rights are ultimately terminated, children will not be forced to choose to love one set of parents more than the other. If we can accept that no parent sets out to deliberately cause a child harm, but rather parents as he or she was parented, then we do not have to judge the birth parent.

Photographs Can Help
My husband and I have found that giving pictures of the child to the parents with no strings attached has opened the door to building our relationship with birth parents. Asking birth parents for pictures of themselves with the child can also help. Such a request says that you are not threatened to be sharing the parenting responsibility with them.

If you are able to be present at the beginning or end of a visit, you could ask permission to photograph the family. Be certain to take a couple pictures of each pose. Then get double prints made so that both the child and the parents will have their own copies. Take pictures of the children individually and as a group. The parents and child will treasure this evidence of connectedness. In the case of a sibling group, each child's picture taken alone with the parents is also a treasure for both child and parent.

If you have no relationship with the parents, pictures are a great place to start. If necessary, send a camera with the social worker and get the first pictures that way. When you send pictures to the parents, include a brief note listing the things the child has been doing since the last visit. This lets child and parent know that this is a team effort. Small, inexpensive photo albums keep pictures from getting dog-eared and allow parents and child to share with others. Knowing their child has family pictures in his or her backpack can be a powerful motivator for the parents, and it says to children that the foster family accepts them and their family.

A storybook to help children understand foster care

Ever wondered how to explain foster care to a child? I wish that when we began fostering sixteen years ago, we had Buttons the Foster Bunny. I am certain our son Matthew and his sister Leslie, who were ages three and nine at the time, would have loved this delightful book written by Teddi Grover Schnurr and illustrated by Diane Iverson. Their questions about foster care would have been answered, and interesting family discussions would have surely followed.

Children and adults who care for children will find it easy to see themselves in the characters of Buttons the Foster Bunny. Buttons, as the title suggests, is a young rabbit. His foster family, which is composed of Mama, Papa, and siblings Rosie and Corky, are squirrels. Misty, also a foster child in the home, is a skunk. Iverson's illustrations are truly beautiful, and lend themselves to additional discussions beyond the story's narrative. This is a book that could be read over and over again.



In a non-threatening and non-judgmental way, Schnurr helps foster children see themselves in the foster home setting and helps foster families recognize what it is like to be a foster child. For example, as the six members of the family eat dinner and the conversation centers on acorn stew and getting used to strange/new foods, I found myself thinking of some of my own cross-cultural dining experiences.

Throughout this story, Mama and Papa Squirrel are portrayed as loving, caring, and supportive. They eagerly await Buttons' arrival, and do all that is in their power to make him feel at home. They also make it clear that they understand Buttons enjoys visiting with his parents and hope he will come to like both of his homes, telling him "No matter what happens, we will love you and take care of you."

Isn't that what we want our foster children to know? Pay close attention to the dedications at the front of the book. My goal is to play a role similar to the one played by the illustrator's foster mother in the life of at least one foster child.

This soft cover book is available at \$8.95 plus \$1 shipping and handling from Teddi Grover Schnurr, P.O. Box 18552, Tucson, AZ 85731-8552. The author may be reached by phone at 520/620-6015.

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